DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 047 UD 024 316

TITLE	Keeping Kentucky's Students in School: An Initial Report on Dropout Prevention.
INSTITUTION	Kentucky State Dept. of Education, Frankfort.
PUB DATE	Apr 85
NOTE	43p.; Prepared by the Kentucky Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission.
PUB TYPE	Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Dropout Characteristics; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Potential Dropouts; *State Aid; *State School District Relationship; Statewide Planning
IDENTIFIERS	*Kentucky

ABSTRACT

The Kentucky Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission, appointed in 1984, found enough evidence to conclude that Kentucky's dropout problem is large enough to merit the development of statewide dropout prevention efforts. Any such effort, the Commission states, will require a commitment from all Kentucky officials, educators, and citizens to educate all children. Furthermore, change at all levels of the education system will be needed, along with adequate State funding of local efforts. And because dropping out is a process, not a single action, prevention programs must be aimed at all levels of education, from kindergarten to twelfth grade, and should include the child's home. Finally, the goal of any prevention effort should be not merely to keep students in school for 12 years, but to provide a quality education to all students. The Commission's specific recommendations to the State Department of Education include the following: (1) define the "dropout"; (2) count the number of dropouts, by district and school; (3) assume a major leadership role; (4) provide funding for local educational authorities to maintain adequate support services for students; (5) expand the current remediation program to grades 3 and 4 and develop methods of reducing the need for remediation; (6) address the special needs of middle and junior high school students and of senior high school students with technical assistance and special funding; and (7) eventually raise the compulsory attendance age to 18 or graduation. (KH)

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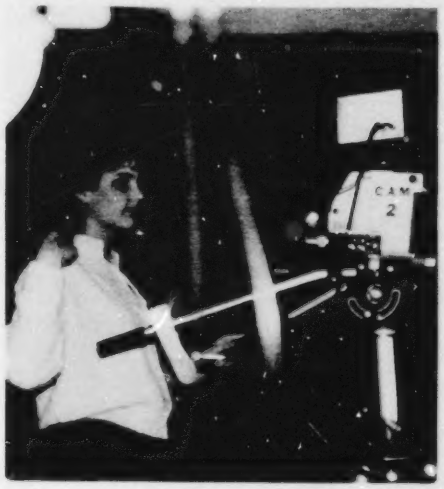

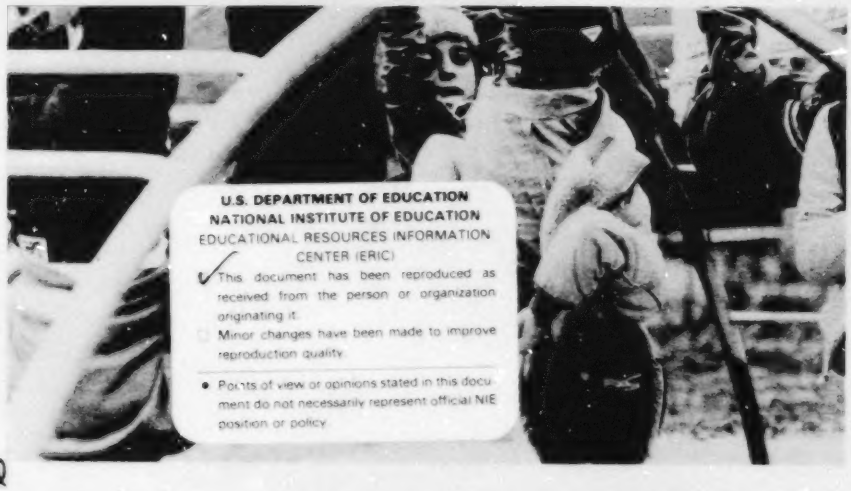

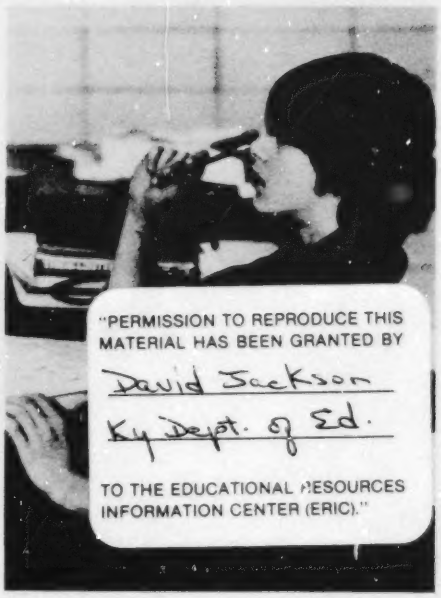

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Keeping Kentucky's Students in School:

An Initial Report on Dropout Prevention

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Alice McDonald, Superintendent
Kentucky Department of Education

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Keeping Kentucky's Students in School:

An Initial Report on Dropout Prevention

Submitted to:

Superintendent Alice McDonald
Kentucky Department of Education

Submitted by:

The Kentucky Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission

April, 1985

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	
The Kentucky Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission	1
The Purpose of This Report	4
DROPPING OUT IN KENTUCKY	
Why Is a High School Education Important?	5
How Many Students Leave School?	7
Why Do Students Leave School?	8
EDUCATING ALL CHILDREN WHAT MUST BE DONE?	
A Kentucky Philosophy of Dropout Prevention	10
Where Change Must Occur	12
Conceptual Framework for Dropout Prevention Efforts	12
FINDINGS	14
RECOMMENDATIONS	
Defining the Term "Dropout"	16
Counting Kentucky's Dropouts	17
State Focus on Dropout Prevention	20
Support Services for Students	22
Different Learning Styles and Different Learning Paces -- Elementary Level	24
Special Needs of Middle and Junior High School Students	25
Dropout Prevention Efforts in High Schools	27
Compulsory School Attendance Age	30
CONCLUSION	32
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	33

INTRODUCTION

The Kentucky Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission

On July 25, 1984, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Alice McDonald, appointed a Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission (referred to in this report as "The Commission"). The Commission was appointed pursuant to Senate Bill 26, passed by the 1984 session of the Kentucky General Assembly, and because of Superintendent McDonald's goal to reduce Kentucky's high school dropout rate.

The Commission was charged with the following tasks:

- to study the dropout problem in Kentucky,
- to examine the body of knowledge concerning the issues that surround dropping out,
- to develop recommendations for Superintendent McDonald aimed at reducing the incidence of dropping out in Kentucky's public schools, and
- to advise the Department in the development of a document to be distributed to all Kentucky school districts that will suggest guidelines for developing local district dropout prevention programs and provide examples of promising programs and practices.

The Commission was composed of twenty-five representatives from a broad spectrum of Kentucky citizens, including non-educational as well as educational organizations. The twenty-five Commission members and four consultants served without remuneration, other than travel expenses incurred. The Division of Compensatory Education's Dropout Prevention Unit provides staff services to the Commission. Funds were made available by Superintendent McDonald to carry out the work of the Commission from money provided to the Department of Education by Chapter 2 of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Wandel D. Strange, Chairman	Superintendent, Hart County Schools
Syble Brady	Librarian, Henderson County Schools Kentucky Education Association Representative
Rafael A. Cordoves	Principal, Leestown Junior High School, Fayette County
Stephanie Collier	Coordinator, Project LINK, Vocational Education Program, Campbell County
Marshall Coyle	Owingsville, Farm Bureau Representative
Sharon Darling	Director, Division of Adult Basic Education, Kentucky Department of Education
Charles Furr	Executive Secretary, Job Training Partnership Act Council, Bureau of Manpower Services
Richard FitzGerald	District Judge, Jefferson County
Brenda Griffin	Coordinator, Adult Learning Kentucky Educational Television, Lexington
Steve Gamble	School Social Worker, Madison County
Dennis Human	Field Office Supervisor, State Department for Social Services School Board Member, Menifee County
Susan Keith	School Board Chairperson, Elizabethtown Independent System Kentucky School Board Association Representative
Sue Eviston Kuhnell	School Teacher - Newport Independent
Joyce Logan	Principal, The Health Occupation Vocational School, Madisonville
Donna Ludwig	High School Principal, Jefferson County
Virginia Maurer	Representative, Kentucky Congress of Parents and Teachers
Kenny Rapier	State Representative, Kentucky General Assembly Member, Education Committee
Mildred Robinson	Member, Kentucky State Board of Education, Ashland

Josephine Richardson	Small Business Owner, Whitesburg
Stuart Sampson	Director, Pupil Personnel, Jefferson County
John Willis Smith	Superintendent, Jackson County Representative, Kentucky Association of School Administrators
Donald R. Snyder	Executive Vice President, Begley Drug Company, Richmond Representative, Chamber of Commerce
H. L. Voss	Professor of Sociology, University of Kentucky
Danny Whitlock	Elementary School Principal, Hickman County
Livingston Alexander	Professor of Psychology, Western Kentucky University

CONSULTANTS

Joanne Brooks	Director, Division of Compensatory Education, Kentucky Department of Education
Don Martin	Superintendent, Jessamine County Schools
Sandra Tuley	Policy Analyst, Kentucky Youth Advocates, Inc.
Randall Wells	Professor of Education, Morehead State University

STAFF

David C. Jackson	Director, Dropout Prevention Unit, Kentucky Department of Education
Diana Peters	Program Coordinator, Dropout Prevention Unit Kentucky Department of Education
Del Crabtree	Program Coordinator, Dropout Prevention Unit, Kentucky Department of Education
Dean Baker	Unit Secretary, Dropout Prevention Unit, Kentucky Department of Education

The Purpose of This Report

The Commission found it impossible to complete all its tasks in one document. This report is the Commission's first. It includes an overview of the Commission's work and its major conclusions and recommendations. A second report will provide specific dropout prevention program suggestions to the local districts.

Kentucky, like many states, has just begun to answer the question: How can we educate all of our citizens? Therefore, this report focuses on general recommendations which are necessary first steps. This report attempts to establish a basis from which an aggressive, statewide dropout prevention effort can be launched. This report and its recommendations should not be considered the end of the study. Rather, the report should be considered a beginning. There are many more questions to be answered.

The Commission has examined much information on specific dropout prevention programs, changes in state statutes, state policy and school structure, and the details of implementing effective programs to educate all children. The possibilities for Kentucky are exciting. However, Kentucky must first establish a strong state leadership and adequate funding in this effort. We must then begin to find which programs work best for Kentucky's children and specifically for the children in individual schools. The Commission hopes that this report will be the impetus for Kentucky to take those first two steps.

DROPPING OUT IN KENTUCKY

Why Is a High School Education Important?

The success of any democracy is dependent upon an educated citizenry. In the beginning of the American dream, Thomas Jefferson observed:

> I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education.

That has never ceased to be an American educational goal. Yet in 1963, in his State of the Union address, President John F. Kennedy found it necessary to address the magnitude of the undereducated and uneducated citizens as evidenced by the national dropout problem. He declared:

> Never before have there been so many students who find the educational process wanting and abandon it; never before has the scholastic experience seemed so remote from what youngsters find real; never before has it been felt to be so hollow, so separated from the world, so irrelevant to the issues that engage us most intensely; never before have so many found it so unchallenging to the imagination, so barren, so just plain boring...
>
> The future of any country which is dependent on the will and wisdom of its citizens is damaged whenever any of its children are not educated to the fullest extent of their capacity...
>
> This is a waste we cannot afford.

Though it is evident that the need for an educated citizenry is basic to a democracy, there is another reason to view dropping out in contemporary society as an increasingly serious problem. Termination of one's education short of high school graduation formerly was a common practice in this country. Today, however, it occurs in a social context quite unlike the situation earlier in this century. Today, the dropout encounters a different world than did his counterpart in the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's who found ready employment in the mills, factories, fields, or mines. In that earlier era, the "dropout" found a job, married, and raised a family; without great difficulty he or she became a conventional citizen. Technological changes have, however, drastically reduced the range and number of jobs available today for the person with less than a high school education. There is no longer a ready-made place for the dropout in the community's economic system. Not only have many unskilled jobs been eliminated, but a high school diploma has become a credential needed for entry into many jobs.

Farming and mining, to cite two examples, have played an important role in Kentucky's economy. Individuals with limited education have found employment in these sectors. These areas undoubtedly will continue to play an important role in the economy of the Commonwealth. However, as technological sophistication increases, persons who are barely literate will find it difficult to comprehend the instruction manuals designed to help persons operate and repair equipment. In addition to literacy, higher level thinking skills will be required for successful planning and management.

Kentucky can never hope to reach its most promising potential until an effort is made to educate <u>all</u> our childen to the fullest extent of their capacity. The Commission found evidence that large numbers of Kentucky's children are not adequately educated.

How Many Students Leave School?

Because the state's data collection method is insufficient and because of a lack of a universal definition of "dropout", it is difficult to count the exact number of Kentucky students who leave school prior to receiving their high school diplomas. However, the available data does make it clear that Kentucky faces a big problem:

- Kentucky ranks 50th among all states in high school graduates: only 53.1% of adults over 25 are high school graduates. (1980, U.S. Census Bureau.)

- Statewide, only 66.3% of the students who entered 9th grade in 1980 graduated in 1984. (Holding Power and Graduates, Kentucky Department of Education, 1984.)

- In 1983, Kentucky ranked 42nd in the country with a graduation rate of 68.4% (percent of ninth graders who graduate four years later). The national average that year was 73.9%. (U.S. Department of Education, January, 1985.)

The Commission agrees with Superintendent McDonald that this record is totally unacceptable. Yet we have great hope that Kentucky stands on the threshold of its finest hour in educational achievement. Governor Collins and Superintendent McDonald have made educational reform their number one priority. The legislature appears to recognize that educational improvement is important to Kentucky's economic future. The climate is ripe for challenging change.

Dropout prevention, coupled with improvement of the quality of educational opportunities, is our state's greatest challenge. But there must be complete awareness that it will do no good at all to just increase educational requirements if those very requirements result in fewer of our youth completing their high school training. Every proposed educational improvement must be examined in light of its effect on the dropout problem. All effort at educational reform must be balanced with increased activity aimed at keeping our high risk youth from dropping out of school. These youth must gain what so many of their parents failed to achieve: the basic education so greatly needed to enhance their lives in our democratic society.

Why Do Students Leave School?

Why would any student leave school prior to graduation? More importantly, why do so many Kentucky students leave school prior to graduation? National and state studies indicate that there are many reasons students leave school. The reasons students leave school can be divided into two broad catagories:

- school related and
- non-school related

Examples of school related reasons students leave school include:

- patterns of failure, both academic and social,
- disinterest in school subjects,
- dislike of or failure to get along with teachers,
- dislike of or failure to get along with other students and
- feelings of harassment by teachers and/or principal.

Examples of non-school related reasons students leave school include:

- unresolved family problems such as divorce or unemployment,
- unresolved financial problems,
- unresolved personal problems,
- seemingly insurmountable barriers to attending school, such as pregnancy or lack of child care and
- lack of family support as a result of little value placed upon schooling.

In the process of reviewing the existing research concerning dropping out, sharing the experience and expertise of the Commission members and examining dropout prevention programming, the Commission arrived at the following conclusions:

o Dropping out is a symptom of a problem and not the problem itself. It is a symptom of socio-economic problems, of a student's personal problems, of family problems, and of school structure factors.

o Dropping out is most often the culmination of a process which for some begins as early as th first grade or before.

- There are exceptions not involving a process where a single incident or factor results in a decision to quit school. Pregnancy for a girl is a good example of an exception where a single factor may result in dropping out.

- There are three critical junctures at which students most often leave school:

  a. during the junior high school years,
  b. around the age of 16, and
  c. just prior to the usual date of high school graduation.

- The most agreed upon identifiers of dropout prone youth include:

  - grade retention--falling one or more grades behind age group,

  - poor reading ability--two or more years below grade level,

  - poor math skills,

  - poor attendance,

  - little or no participation in school activities,

  - social isolation--no social bonding,

  - disruptive behavior in school, including trouble with rules or conflict with staff, and

  - family history of dropping out--family does not value education,

To keep students in school, dropout prevention efforts must address the reasons students leave school. The school cannot solve all problems. However, changes can be made in the school to solve some problems. Additionally, the school can assist the student to learn and to complete school, in spite of whatever problems may exist.

EDUCATING ALL CHILDREN: WHAT MUST BE DONE?

A Kentucky Philosophy of Dropout Prevention

All children have a right to a free public education. Additionally, it is necessary to Kentucky's future that all its citizens are well educated. When students withdraw from school prior to high school graduation, the losses are great for both the individual and for society. Kentucky cannot, for its own well-being as well as that of its citizens, continue to tolerate the large numbers of students who leave school without a high school diploma, the large numbers of adults who never return to school for a high school equivalency, or the large numbers of children and adults, both graduates and non-graduates, who cannot read well enough to function independently in our society.

Kentucky's policy-makers and all citizens must first recognize that we do have a dropout problem. Second, we must recognize that we can do something about this problem. Kentucky policymakers and all citizens must be committed to the inclusion of all children in a quality education program. From this will come effective dropout prevention efforts.

Basic to a comprehensive dropout prevention effort are the following:

- o Good basic education is a necessary part of any dropout prevention effort. We must ensure that our schools are:
  - responding to the individual educational needs of each child,
  - ensuring that a child's basic needs are met, so the child can take full advantage of the educational program offered,
  - developing the potential of each child and leading that child toward an independent, productive adult life,

- taking into consideration the developmental needs of the whole child, especially within age groups, and

- including students and parents in decision-making processes of the school.

- o Schools must look to students, parents, teachers, and the entire local community to help them solve problems and strengthen their educational program.

- o Parents have a right--and an obligation--to be involved in their child's education. Schools have an obligation to foster this involvment.

- o Children too have rights. Children should not suffer for their parents' actions or inaction.

- o Dropping out of school is most often the result of a process which may begin as early as elementary school. Interventions to reduce the incidence of dropping out must be designed to address the process at all different levels of development.

- o Basic to any level of intervention is the provision of opportunities for all students to experience both academic and social success.

- o Early intervention is essential to change the course in which a student is headed. Those problems which identify a student as "high risk" must be addressed in the elementary grades.

- o To adequately address the dropout problem there must be an openness to institutional change. In order to better serve our children in school, Kentucky must be willing to change state laws, state funding levels and formulas, and state and local policies and practices that relate to public schools.

Dropout prevention efforts must seek to create schools which serve all children. Kentucky schools can become places where all children enjoy learning, where all students are challenged, where all students reach their potential, and where all children choose to remain until graduation. Kentucky's children can have schools that work for them.

Where Change Must Occur

If Kentucky is to effectively address the dropout problem, change must occur at every level of our education system. Kentucky's citizens, educators, policymakers, and state leaders must be committed to educating ALL children.

Kentucky legislators must be committed to providing the necessary funding and enacting enabling legislation. Kentucky state leaders must make all children's education a priority. The Kentucky Department of Education must set state policy and regulations aimed at educating all children. The Department must also provide local districts with needed information, program ideas and technical assistance.

Kentucky schools must ensure that all students are being served equally. They must ensure that parents, students and teachers are involved in making decisions and in solving problems. Last, but certainly not least, Kentucky citizens must be committed to the education of their children and to the education of all children.

Conceptual Framework for Dropout Prevention Efforts

As the Commission studied the many and varied reasons that students drop out of school, it was obvious that successful prevention strategies must be designed at least at four levels:

PRIMARY ACTION:	programs and activities that are designed to make the school experience more relevant and meaningful for all students.
PRIMARY PREVENTION:	programs and activities that focus on certain target problems.
SECONDARY PREVENTION:	programs and activities that target specific students exhibiting problem behaviors.
RE-ENTRY:	programs aimed at students who have already left school.

Primary action, or "good basic education", is a broad area. This Commission does not have the time, nor is it part of our charge, to adequately address total educational reform. We recognize, however, that every aspect of school policy, school administration, and school practice has some impact on the dropout problem. We have addressed primary action on a limited basis in this report. Many education reform groups are making recommendations which address the broader issue of "good basic education". The Commission believes that all such groups should examine every recommended reform in light of dropout research. Educational reform proposals should aim at improving basic education for all students, including students of high risk. This Commission hopes that all recommended education reform measures will serve to reduce the dropout rate and increase the educational opportunities for the "at-risk" children.

We have focused our recommendations at primary and secondary prevention and re-entry programs. Primary prevention programs address general groups of students at risk of falling behind academically, or not adjusting to the social routine of school, or experiencing conflicting messages between the school and their home environment. Secondary prevention programs address specific students identified as at risk of dropping out. Re-entry programs are aggressive and flexible programs aimed at encouraging dropouts to return to finish their graduation requirements at any time and in other than the 8:00 - 3:00 school day. However, re-entry program planners must recognize that the students who leave an unsatisfactory school setting do not magically find it acceptable six months or two years later, if the school remains essentially unchanged.

FINDINGS

The findings which formed the basis for the Commission's recommendations are:

- o While current data collection and reporting systems are inadequate and inaccurate, enough evidence is available to conclude that large numbers of Kentucky citizens do not receive a high school education.

- o A high dropout rate represents a loss of human resources which is devastating to the individual, the local community, and to the state of Kentucky.

- o Some school districts in Kentucky and in other states have effectively reduced their dropout rate. Therefore, there is something which can be done to keep students in school.

- o Any effective dropout prevention effort will require:

    - A commitment from and the involvement of all Kentucky officials, educators and citizens to educate all children.

    - Change at all levels of the education system: the legislature, the state Department of Education and the local district.

    - Adequate funding to local districts from the Kentucky legislature.

- o Dropping out of school is a process, not a single action, involving both school-related and personal problems. Therefore, prevention programs must be aimed at all levels of education, kindergarten through twelfth grade, and should include the child's home.

- o The goal of Kentucky's dropout prevention effort should be not merely to keep students in school for twelve years, but to provide a quality education to all students.

The Commission found that developing a state plan to educate all children presents a large and complex problem. To ensure that their recommendations were focused, yet inclusive, the Commission decided that two reports were necessary. This first report covers what the Commission sees as the major recommendations aimed primarily at the Kentucky General Assembly and the Kentucky Department of Education (The Department). A second report will cover recommendations and suggestions for state-of-the-art prevention programs aimed at the local districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations listed in this report are those considered by the Commission as major recommendations. These recommendations are not the total answer to Kentukcy's dropout problem. Rather, these major recommendations represent a beginning. These "first steps" must be taken before others can follow.

Defining the Term "Dropout"

Recommendation

> The State Board of Education and Kentucky Department of Education should establish a state definition of "dropout".

Rationale

It is essential that the term "dropout" be precisely defined in writing. A written definition will serve two purposes:

- o to establish a consistent definition of "dropout" to aid in program planning, and
- o to assist in developing an accurate data collection mechanism.

We reviewed many definitions used in various studies and those adopted by other states.

A suggested definition of "dropout" which incorporates ideas from all the reviewed definitions is:

> A dropout is any person who leaves elementary or secondary school prior to high school graduation for any reason except death, and who does not enter, within a reasonable period of time, another full-time public or private school program which leads to a high school diploma, or the completion of a state approved, prescribed program.

This definition does not allow any exceptions because of the essential nature of a high school education in today's society. No matter what the reason for not completing high school, the price to the individual and to society is too great.

Counting Kentucky's Dropouts

Recommendation

- The State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education should develop a student accounting system which provides an accurate count of the number of dropouts in Kentucky by district and by school. These data should be collected and reported by race, sex, and socio-economic background of the student.

- The State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education should require all local districts to follow up on all dropouts at six months and at twelve months to determine what they are doing and if returning to school is feasible. State funding should be provided to conduct this activity.

Rationale

The Commission has examined the current data available that are used to describe the extent of the dropout problem in Kentucky. Neither of the data sources available accurately count students who fail to graduate from high school.

The holding power statistic is calculated by dividing the number of graduates by the number of ninth graders who enrolled four years earlier. This statistic does not take into account students who move into or out of a particular school district or students who graduate in more or less than the traditional four years.

The dropout statistic is also problematic. It is an aggregation of all the students, by grade level 7-12, who withdraw during the school year for the following reasons:

- they became 16 and voluntarily dropped out (coded "W-6" on school reporting forms),

- they were excused because of a mental or physical disability (coded "W-7" on school reporting forms),

- they were discharged by the school (coded "W-10" on school reporting forms), or

- they were married (coded "W-11" on school reporting forms).

Some districts may not keep data that allow an unduplicated count. Therefore, the student who withdraws and returns again is counted as a dropout. A more serious problem is that students who simply do not return to school ("summer dropouts") for the next year are not counted at all.

It is apparent that neither of the two data collection systems discussed above is consistent with the definition proposed by this Commission. Therefore, a new or revised system of collecting data is needed.

The student accounting system being developed by the Kentucky Department of Education should be developed and implemented to collect data on dropouts. If it is individualized (by a personal identification number or name), this system can produce unduplicated counts. Besides just a numerical count, the system should generate useful data on why students dropped out of school. Categories in the code might include:

- o failing grades
- o lack of interest
- o conflict with the school
- o expulsion
- o economic hardship
- o pregnancy or marriage
- o peer conflicts
- o alternative plans (employment, military service)
- o mental or physical disability
- o family or personal problems

The data should reflect the student's assessment of the situation. Such data are valuable if we are to design dropout prevention programs that really address the problem. This information will also assist in evaluating the effectiveness of dropout prevention efforts.

Additionally, many students wish to return to school. Therefore, schools should contact dropouts to encourage them to return and finish their requirements for high school graduation. Follow-up contacts can also assist the schools in determining what happens to students after they drop out and in measuring the school's need for re-entry programs.

State Focus on Dropout Prevention

Recommendations

- The Kentucky Department of Education should take a major leadership role in addressing the state's dropout problem. The Department should strengthen its role in providing direction and assistance to the local districts in addressing their dropout problem.

    a. The Kentucky Department of Education should require, as part of the accreditation process, that every Local Education Agency (LEA) have a specific and written K-12 strategy to consistently address dropout prevention in all schools.

    b. The Department of Education in consultation with the Cabinet for Human Resources should plan and implement a comprehensive public awareness effort utilizing all types of media including commercial television as well as Kentucky Educational Television.

    c. The Department should initiate action aimed at improving communications among the Cabinet for Human Resources (CHR), the Department of Education, the LEA and local mental health and other community resources concerning linkage with workers for foster children, juvenile offenders, and the families of poor children.

    d. The Department should initiate action aimed at improving communications between local public schools and higher education. Specifically, cooperative programs and services should be identified which would help local public schools reduce their dropout rate (programs such as Talent Search, and services such as counseling, tutoring and psychological evaluations).

- The Department should place a high priority on this leadership role and should budget adequate funds to provide the staff and resources necessary to carry out this responsibility.

Rationale

Because the dropout problem is a state-wide problem, the Kentucky Department of Education must take a strong leadership role in the dropout prevention effort. The need for appropriate funding and state-of-the-art dropout prevention information, technical assistance to local districts and monitoring of local district policies and practices can best be met by the Department. Additionally, much needed research and demonstration projects must be initiated, monitored and evaluated by the Department.

A public awareness campaign can have a major, positive impact that will aid the dropout prevention effort. A public awareness campaign could include:

- publicizing the extent of the problem,
- publicizing the effects dropping out has on Kentucky's economy as well as on the quality of life for Kentucky's citizens, and
- publicizing the need for public involvement.

Support Services For Students

Recommendations

- The Legislature should provide funding for LEA's to hire certified "support staff" (school social workers, school counselors, and/or school psychologists) in elementary and secondary schools, at the ratio of at least 1:250, to specifically address the special social and emotional needs of all children, giving first priority to the children at risk.

- The State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education should include as part of their accreditation process an assessment of the extent to which the LEA's are using the newly funded "support staff" persons to help all children, giving first priority to the "children at risk."

- The local districts should place a high priority on providing support staff persons in elementary schools as well as counselors in junior high and high schools with the necessary resources to work effectively with at-risk children.

Rationale

Academic programs are of course the core of the public school systems. Schools assign almost all their personnel to address students' academic needs. However, schools at all levels cannot ignore the fact that students are developing socially, emotionally, and physically and that school personnel must also address students' needs in these areas. The academic achievement of students is closely tied to their feelings about themselves and their schools. How a child feels affects what a child learns, and what a child learns affects how a child feels. Feeling and learning are inseparable. There is a great need for special attention to be given to the "feeling" needs of high-risk children. Social and emotional needs of high-risk children must be attended if they are to develop an adequate positive self concept and in turn succeed in school. There is much evidence that indicates that youth who experience both social and academic success in school seldom leave school before graduation. Therefore, basic to a comprehensive dropout prevention effort is a school professional trained to address affective needs of children.

This professional would enhance the remedial education program. The need for support services and the need for remediation are often related. Many children fail academically because of other developmental problems or because of problems they face outside school. Both a remedial education program and a program designed to provide support services are important to the success of all students and to effective dropout prevention. However, one will have limited success without the other.

Middle and high schools are currently required to have guidance counselors at a staff student ratio of 1:500. Unfortunately, this ratio does not allow the counselor to do much more than assist students in course selection and college preparation. Additional counselors are needed to specifically meet the social and emotional needs of at-risk children. Additionally, elementary schools are not currently required to have any counseling staff. Many schools have none. Others have too few counseling staff and/or the counselors are bogged down with administrative responsibilities and have little time for students.

Central to the success of such a school counseling program is a staff position whose function would be to ensure that the program is fully implemented. The person in this position would:

- o be an expert in child development,
- o provide technical assistance to teachers,
- o design and implement activities to foster social and emotional development,
- o ensure that all developmental disabilities are properly diagnosed and appropriate services offered,
- o assist children and families, individually or in groups, with various school related problems,
- o ensure that all policies, programs and practices in the school are appropriate for children at a given developmental stage,
- o be accessible to all students,

- o be knowledgeable about community resources available and make appropriate referrals for services outside the school, and
- o provide statistics and data for local and state monitoring.

Different Learning Styles And Different Learning Paces--Elementary Level

Recommendations

- o The legislature should provide the necessary funding during the 1986 General Assembly to expand the current remediation program to grades 3 and 4.
- o The Kentucky Department of Education should research and develop methods for local districts to reduce the need for remediation.

Rationale

Children and adults all learn in different ways and at different paces. This difference does not have to mean academic failure for any child. Children's special, individual learning needs can be addressed throughout their educational experience.

Individual differences do not need to be viewed as handicaps or have positive or negative values placed on them. Most children's individual needs can be met in the mainstream education program by making some changes in the traditional elementary school, such as varying the teaching methods and emphasizing individual instruction.

Reducing academic failure and eliminating the stigma attached to being "different" will provide a more positive educational experience for at-risk children and will increase their educational opportunities. The result will be that more children will stay in school.

Special Needs of Middle and Junior High School Students

Recommendations

- The legislature should provide incentive funding for LEA's to develop dropout prevention programs in junior high and middle schools.
- The Kentucky Department of Education should provide technical assistance to LEA's in developing dropout prevention programs in junior high and middle schools.
- The local districts should develop and implement dropout prevention programs in junior high and middle schools which address the special needs of early adolescents and are aimed at improving the educational experience for at-risk children.
- The local districts should, with the aid of teachers, parents and students, develop and implement alternative, dropout prevention, and re-entry programs, and they should review annually the effectiveness of these programs.
- The local districts should make available to all parents and students information about all alternative, dropout prevention, and re-entry programs.
- Maintain pre-vocational course offerings at a high level to offer "hands-on" learning and cooperative educational experiences which have proven successful in preventing dropping out.

Rationale

Middle school and junior high school students are, developmentally, at a special time in their life. At a time when they are experiencing drastic changes physically and emotionally, they are also experiencing a change in the way they are educated. The transition from the self-contained elementary classroom to the departmentalized middle or junior high school is not an easy transition for many students. They may suffer academically, socially and emotionally if the adjustment is a difficult one.

Studies show that many students dropout at the junior high school level. Dropout prevention programs at the middle or junior high school level must be aimed at the special needs of early adolescents and should include an awareness of career opportunities. Efforts must also be made to reduce the traumatic effects of large, departmental schools.

Middle and junior high schools can assist students in making the difficult transition from elementary school. This can be done by implementing special programs such as orientation programs and individual or group support programs. Additionally, the school schedule can be structured so that departmentalization occurs gradually over a two to three year period rather than abruptly. This would allow adolescents a gradual change from the self-contained elementary classroom.

Middle and junior high schools must be designed and staffed with the developmental needs of the adolescent child in mind. This means:

- ensuring that each student receives some individual attention,
- building each child's self esteem,
- providing each child with an opportunity to develop a positive relationship with an adult staff person,
- gradually developing each child's sense of responsibility,
- allowing for increasingly greater student input and student independence,
- allowing for program flexibility,
- selecting staff (not just teachers) who understand this age group and are willing to work with them, and
- providing pre-service and periodic in-service training to all staff on the special needs of early adolescents and how staff can meet these needs.

Dropout Prevention Efforts In High School

Recommendations

- The Legislature should provide funding to the Department of Education to be utilized for grants to LEA's to develop and implement innovative dropout prevention and re-entry programs for high school youth.

- The Kentucky Department of Education should provide technical assistance to LEA's in developing and implementing alternative dropout prevention/re-entry programs. The Department should monitor such programs to determine their effectiveness.

- The local districts should, with the aid of teachers, parents and students, develop and implement alternative, dropout prevention, and re-entry programs, and they should review annually the effectiveness of these programs.

- The local districts should make available to all parents and students information about all alternative, dropout prevention, and re-entry programs.

- Maintain vocational course offerings at a high level to offer "hands-on" learning and cooperative educational experiences which have proven successful in preventing dropping out.

Rationale

Many students drop out of school at the high school level because:

- they cannot succeed in the existing program;

- they do not view existing programs as relevant to their lives;

- they are unable to attend school during the traditional hours;

- they feel unwanted or feel they are being "pushed out".

By addressing these problems, schools can reduce the dropout rate at the high school level. A high school student is no longer a child, but is making the difficult transition into the adult world. High school students must be allowed to make some decisions for themselves, and therefore must be given some alternatives from which to choose.

Kentucky should expand the development of alternative programs in public schools. The Department of Education should make information about alternative programs available to local districts and to the public. Alternative programs should be designed to meet the individual needs of students who may not be benefiting from the traditional high school program.

Some students who drop out of school wish to return later. Schools should develop flexible re-entry programs to afford students an opportunity to complete their high school graduation requirements, regardless of re-entry dates. Schools should also make periodic contacts with dropouts to encourage them to return to school.

Currently, a limited number of Kentucky schools are providing some special dropout prevention services at the high school level. Funding for these activities is provided primarily through a contract with the Kentucky Department of Employment Services by utilizing Federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds.

These funds are <u>not</u> adequate to address Kentucky's dropout problem because JTPA funds are limited and are not intended for use in developing comprehensive dropout prevention programs. Specifically:

- JTPA funds are primarily for employment training purposes. This serves the needs of only a small group of Kentucky's potential dropouts.
- JTPA funds are not even adequate to serve the employment training needs of all Kentucky youth, much less the broader range of service needs for dropout prone youth.

- Federal restrictions prohibit the use of JTPA funds for many proven dropout prevention strategies.

- Income and age eligibility requirements prevent the use of JTPA funds for many students in need. The funds are intended for a target population which does not include all dropout prone youth.

- It is clear that basic state funding is needed if Kentucky is to develop a comprehensive dropout prevention program designed to meet the needs of all at-risk students.

Compulsory School Attendance Age

Recommendation

When statewide funding to local districts is provided in 1986 and 1988 for special programs and services designed to address the needs of students that are high risk, then in 1990 raise the compulsory attendance age to 18 or graduation.

Rationale

The current compulsory school attendance law requires school attendance to age 16 and allows a student to drop out of school after 16 if the parent gives written permission. It is important to set an expectation that all children receive a high school diploma. However, raising the compulsory school attendance law alone will not achieve that expectation.

As identified earlier in this report, students drop out of school for many reasons, both home-related and school-related. While schools cannot solve all problems, schools can implement programs which solve some problems and make it possible for students to stay in school and receive a high school diploma. To have any positive effect on the current dropout rate, funds must be made available statewide for schools to develop special and alternative programs. Special assistance to children at risk will help them learn and enhance chances of graduation. Such assistance will convey society's expectation that all students receive a high school diploma.

In the absence of funds for alternative programs, raising the compulsory attendance age would lead to devastating consequences, in both human and economic terms. Some would-be dropouts would simply comply with the law and continue attending school. They would receive no different or special services, however, and would continue to face the same problems that prompted them to want to leave school. Some would never graduate from high school, but would instead attend to age eighteen. They would, therefore, still be "dropouts."

Many students, however, would not comply with the law. The school disruption and truancy rate would increase. More money would necessarily be spent on enforcing the law on "prosecuting" truants. More funds would be needed for:

- o additional pupil personnel staff,
- o additional district court time,
- o additional state social work staff, and
- o additional out-of-home placements.

Spending money to "prosecute" truants would not be cost effective. This money would be better spent at the local school level for special and alternative programs to help students solve problems, to help students learn, and to help students graduate from high school.

CONCLUSION

Kentucky can and must be successful in educating all of its children. A high dropout rate and an uneducated population is devastating to the individual, the local community and to the state in both human and economic terms.

A successful dropout prevention effort will require a strong commitment on the part of Kentucky decision-makers, educators and citizens. This report suggests a beginning, the necessary first steps in addressing an urgent problem. The Commission urges that Kentucky take these first steps. The Commission also urges that the dropout prevention effort continue after these first steps are taken. It is vital to Kentucky's future that we develop schools that serve all children well.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission

The Kentucky Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission was appointed on July 25, 1984, by Superintendent of Public Instruction Alice McDonald as a result of legislation passed by the 1984 General Assembly. The legislation was a response to a growing concern about the number of Kentucky citizens who fail to receive high school diplomas. The 1980 United States Census ranked Kentucky last in the nation in the number of adults over 25 with high school diplomas.

The Dropout Prevention Advisory Commission (The Commission) was charged with the following tasks:

- to study the dropout problem in Kentucky,
- to examine the body of knowledge concerning the issues that surround dropping out,
- to develop recommendations for Superintendent McDonald aimed at reducing the incidence of dropping out in Kentucky's public schools, and
- to advise the Department in the development of a document to be distributed to all Kentucky school districts that will suggest guidelines for developing local district dropout prevention programs and provide examples of promising programs and practices.

The Commission members brought with them their own experiences and knowledge about students who drop out of school. Additionally, the Commission reviewed studies and reports completed in Kentucky and in other states. An effort was made to determine why students drop out of school and what changes need to be made to keep students in school.

This Executive Summary lists the Commission's findings and recommendations. The full report discusses the recommendations in more detail.

Findings

The findings which formed the basis for the Commission's recommendations are:

- o While current data collection and reporting systems are inadequate and inaccurate, enough evidence is available to conclude that large numbers of Kentucky citizens do not receive a high school education.

- o A high dropout rate represents a loss of human resources which is devastating to the individual, the local community, and to the state of Kentucky.

- o Some school districts in Kentucky and in other states have effectively reduced their dropout rate. Therefore, there is something which can be done to keep students in school.

- o Any effective dropout prevention effort will require:

  - A commitment from and the involvement of all Kentucky officials, educators and citizens to educate all children.

  - Change at all levels of the education system: the legislature, the state Department of Education and the local district.

  - Adequate funding to local districts from the Kentucky legislature.

- o Dropping out of school is a process, not a single action, involving both school-related and personal problems. Therefore, prevention programs must be aimed at all levels of education, kindergarten through twelfth grade, and should include the child's home.

- o The goal of Kentucky's dropout prevention effort should be not merely to keep students in school for twelve years, but to provide a quality education to all students.

The Commission found that developing a state plan to educate all children presents a large and complex problem. To ensure that their recommendations were focused, yet inclusive, the Commission decided that two reports were necessary. This first report covers what the Commission sees as the major recommendations aimed primarily at the Kentucky General Assembly and the Kentucky Department of Education (The Department). A second report will cover recommendations and suggestions for state-of-the-art prevention programs aimed at the local districts.

Recommendations

The Commission's major recommendations, seen as the necessary first steps toward dropout prevention, are:

Defining the Term "Dropout"

The State Board of Education and Kentucky Department of Education should establish a state definition of "dropout."

Counting Kentucky's Dropouts

- The State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education should develop a student accounting system which provides an accurate count of the number of dropouts in Kentucky by district and by school. These data should be collected and reported by race, sex, and socio-economic background of the student.

- The State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education should require all local districts to follow up on all dropouts at six months and at twelve months to determine what they are doing and if returning to school is feasible. State funding should be provided to conduct this activity.

State Focus on Dropout Prevention

- The Kentucky Department of Education should take a major leadership role in addressing the state's dropout problem. The Department should strengthen its role in providing direction and assistance to the local districts in addressing their dropout problem.

    a. The Kentucky Department of Education should require, as part of the accreditation process, that every Local Education Agency (LEA) have a specific and written K-12 strategy to consistently address dropout prevention in all schools.

    b. The Department of Education in consultation with the Cabinet for Human Resources should plan and implement a comprehensive public awareness effort utilizing all types of media including commercial television as well as Kentucky Educational Television.

c. The Department should initiate action aimed at improving communications among the Cabinet for Human Resources (CHR), the Department of Education, the LEA and local mental health and other community resources concerning linkage with workers for foster children, juvenile offenders, and the families of poor children.

d. The Department should initiate action aimed at improving communications between local public schools and higher education. Specifically, cooperative programs and services should be identified which would help local public schools reduce their dropout rate. (Programs such as Talent Search and services such as counseling, tutoring, and psychological evaluations.)

- The Department should place a high priority on its leadership role and should budget adequate funds to provide the staff and resources necessary to carry out this responsibility.

Support Services for Students

- The Legislature should provide funding for LEA's to hire certified "support staff" (school social workers, school counselors, and/or school psychologists) in elementary and secondary schools, at the ratio of at least 1:250, to specifically address the special social and emotional needs of all children, giving first priority to the children at risk.

- The State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education should include as part of their accreditation process an assessment of the extent to which the LEA's are using the newly funded "support staff" persons to help all children, giving first priority to the "children at risk."

- The local districts should place a high priority on providing the support staff persons in elementary schools as well as counselors in junior high and high schools with the necessary resources to work effectively with at-risk children.

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Conclusion

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